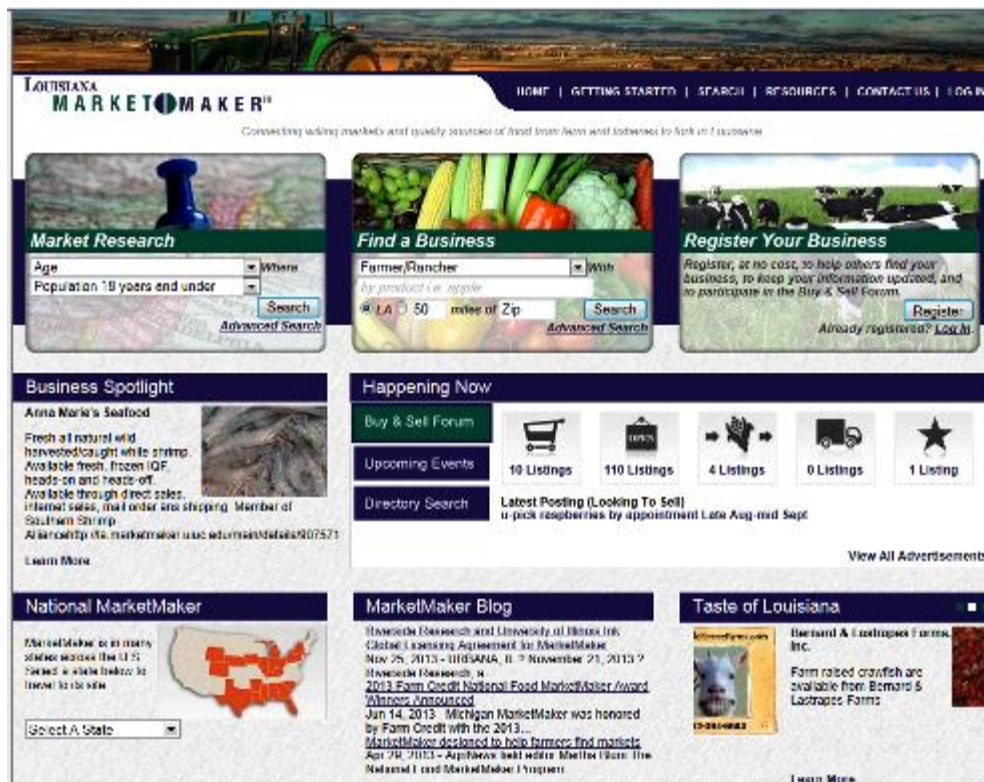


## Coastal Fishermen Connect with Online Buyers through State Disaster Recovery Grant, LSU AgCenter Website

July 8, 2014



*Louisiana MarketMaker's Website*

BATON ROUGE, La. – An online purchasing website has garnered more than 4.6 million hits and created revenue for 72 commercial fishermen and shrimpers in the coastal parishes of Louisiana, thanks to a \$125,000 grant awarded to the LSU AgCenter from the state Office of Community Development-Disaster Recovery Unit.

The LSU AgCenter is using the funds to reach out to coastal fishermen who were hard-hit by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, teaching them how to use an online interactive technology called MarketMaker that links sellers with buyers.

Louisiana MarketMaker, <http://la.foodmarketmaker.com/>, was started in 2010 by Dr. John Westra of LSU's Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness. It is the local component of a national website that provides a comprehensive database of fishers, farmers and food retailers, matching food producers with consumer markets.

"We knew that our fishermen and shrimpers took a real hit from hurricanes Gustav and Ike, and we knew we needed to help them in a way that would make the industry more sustainable for the long term," said OCD Executive Director Pat Forbes. "Providing funds for this website was uncharted territory for us, and it's exciting to see the response the fishermen have had from consumers looking for great Louisiana seafood."

The 72 Louisiana fishermen are part of nearly 500 agribusiness and 21,000 Louisiana food businesses that have signed up with the site as a result of the three-year grant. The goal of the program originally was to have 100,000 hits on the website by potential consumers. As of April 30, 2014, there were nearly 4.6 million hits on the site – more than 100,000 hits each month.

“OCD provided the initial funding that proved so critical in establishing the Louisiana MarketMaker program,” Westra said. “The number of buyers using the site to source and buy Louisiana seafood and other local food products, as well as the number of firms that have registered their businesses on Louisiana MarketMaker, is testament to the important role the website plays in the food supply or value chain in our state.”

The influx of participants can be attributed to an aggressive marketing campaign by Westra, which includes webinars, local meetings, workshops, trade shows and more than 22,000 “push cards” advertising the site.

The award to Louisiana MarketMaker through the OCD-DRU’s \$15 million Fisheries Program is part of \$1 billion in Community Development Block Grant funding the state received from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for recovery from hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

*The Disaster Recovery Unit within the Office of Community Development is dedicated to helping Louisiana’s citizens recover from hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav, Ike and Isaac. As the state’s central point for hurricane recovery, the OCD-DRU manages the most extensive rebuilding effort in American history, working closely with local, state and federal partners to ensure that Louisiana recovers safer, stronger and smarter than before.*

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